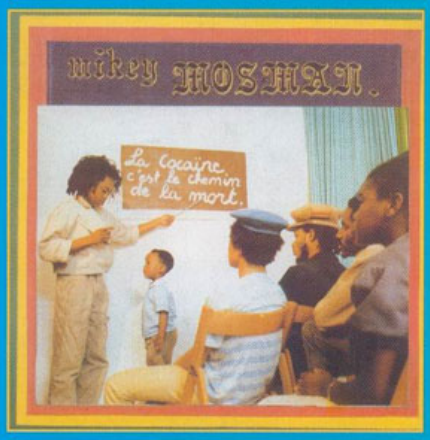


some peoples' minds.

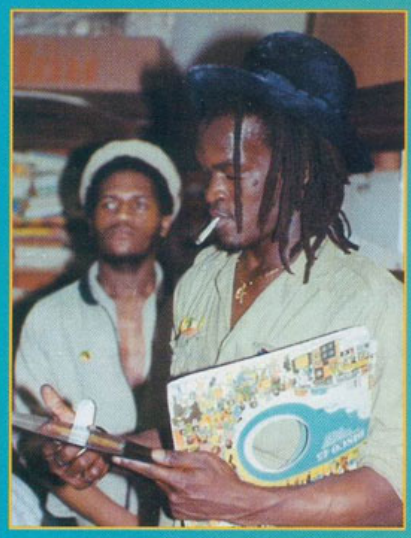
It wasn't until the spring of 1983 that the random and poorly organized dancehall-reggae parties would take the form of Jamaican sound systems, with a familiar crew of selectors and toasters playing out on a regular basis with solid sound equipment and a decent following of patrons. This sound had no real name but was identified by the name of the street on which the events took place (the "rue des Panoyaux") and was created by true reggae enthusiasts (such as Papa Ange, Ras Gugus, General Burning), often originating from the "free radios" crowd which had been pioneers in pushing a lot of reggae on the airwaves from 1978. The live chatting/toasting/deejaying was in English then.

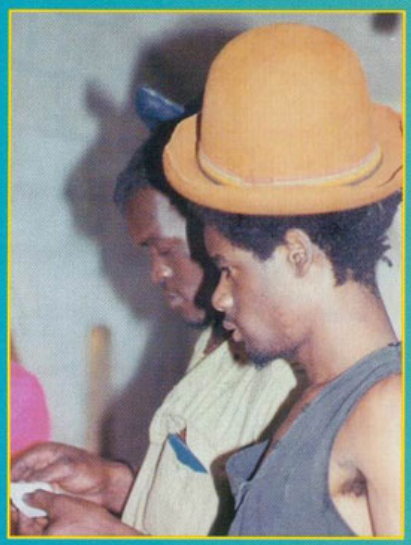
Two artists who would later become cornerstones of the scene started to touch the microphone during these sessions: Daddy Yod (later to be crowned King Daddy Yod, originating from Guadeloupe) and the very young Jacky (soon to be called Super John, also from the French West Indies). This initiative was soon followed by others such as Dread Lions, Pablo Master's Youthman Academy (1984), the Kwame N'Krumah sound (1986 with Little Dany), High Fight (1987–Tonton David, Daddy Nuttea, Fefe Typical, Don Lickshot and selector Polino) and Jah Wisdom, the roots Afro-centrist sound of Kodjo Asher. The Youthman Academy would become the main posse in the second half of the '80s with singers and toasters like Pablo himself, Daddy Yod, Mikey Mosman, General Murphi, Princess Erika and singjay Super John.

Towards the end of the 1980s, other pioneering sounds emerged such as Earthquake Sound System (with legendary selector and radio host Lord Zeljko, Pupa Johnny, Sai Sai: two djs in a combination style, Mr. Ricky and Ramses Ooki); King Dragon; and Lord Zeljko's new sound, the first to feature large amounts of Jamaican dubplates, with the best djs around: Colonel Ruben, Little Dany, King Daddy Yod, Sai Sai.

During those sessions, the djs would translate Jamaican lyrics and sometimes even typical Jamaican patois expressions in French, thus creating a new way of talking and a slang of their own, and ride fiercely over the digital riddims. Creole (French West Indies patois) was also often heard. The roughneck ragga-muffin style of the djs was always preferred by the French massive, fitting the militant mood of this still-underground scene and its actors, often sons of immigrant workers "parked" in Paris suburban ghetto areas, while the lovers style never really caught on. Not surprisingly, women were rarely to be seen during those sessions. Among the various Jamaican dj styles, the fast chatters such as Papa San or Lt. Stitchie were household favorites and influenced many popular djs such a Little Dany (fastest French MC ever) and Daddy Mory.

Two decades after its limited start, the French dancehall-reggae scene is now flourishing, with literally hundreds of sound systems and artists pushing the dancehall-reggae movement forward, with veterans and newcomers alike each claiming their slice of the éclair. ★





Early days of Panoyaux Sound with toasters Jahcan and Daddy Yod in Paris, 1983

Online sources

"The first sound in Paris," by Ras Gugus: **http://paris70.free.fr/panoyaux.htm**

"The origins of reggae in France" by General Burning: **http://paris70.free.fr/reggae.htm**

Most tracks mentioned in this article can be heard on my site: **http://www.dancehallstyle.com/french/**